

Message Text

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51

ACTION EUR-25

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2806

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

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E. O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: FIRST ROUND OF FRENCH BY-ELECTIONS: TWO IN,
TWO HOPEFUL, TWO IN TROUBLE

REF: PARIS 22848

SUMMARY: IN THE SEPTEMBER 29 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTIONS, TWO OF SIX FORMER POMPIDOU CABINET MEMBERS, PIERRE MESSMER AND OLIVIER GUICHARD, REGAINED THEIR OLD PARLIAMENTARY SEATS ON THE FIRST ROUND. TWO OTHERS, HENRI TORRE AND YVES GUENA' STAND A GOOD CHANCE OF VICTORY IN NEXT SUNDAY'S RUN-OFF ELECTIONS. WHILE THE REMAINING TWO, JEAN-PHILIPPE LECAT AND JOSEPH FONTANET, ARE IN DIFFICULTY. THE NON-COMMUNIST LEFT REGISTERED SUBSTANTIAL GAINS; WHILE THIS COULD INDICATE A DROP IN ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR GISCARD'S NEW MAJORITY, IT MORE CLEARLY REPRESENTS DISSATISFACTION WITH CERTAIN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POMPIDOU REGIME. END SUMMARY.

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1. ALL MAJORITY CANDIDATES FELL SHORT OF THEIR SCORES IN THE MARCH 1973 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. EVEN WHILE WINNING HANDILY, MESSMER SAW HIS TOTAL FALL 17 PERCENT TO 55 PERCENT OF VOTES CAST. TORRE AND GUENA CAME CLOSE ENOUGH TO ABSOLUTE MAJORITIES SO THAT THEIR ELECTION NEXT SUNDAY SEEMS ASSURED. THE GOING WILL BE TOUGHER FOR LECAT, RUNNING IN THE COTE-D'OR AGAINST LEFT RADICAL PIERRE CHARLES. AND FORMER EDUCATION MINISTER FONTANET STANDS TO LOSE IN SAVOY TO SOCIALIST MAURICE BLANC, WHO RECEIVED 31 PERCENT OF FIRST-ROUND VOTES CAST COMPARED WITH 20 PERCENT IN 1973.

2. A STRIKING FEATURE OF THE FIRST-ROUND RESULTS WERE THE GAINS REGISTERED BY THE SOCIALISTS AND LEFT RADICALS IN THESE SIX RURAL DISTRICTS WHICH HAVE TRADITIONALLY FAVORED MAJORITY CANDIDATES. AT THE SAME TIME THE COMMUNISTS EITHER LOST VOTES OR STAYED AT ABOUT THE SAME STRENGTH AS IN 1973. THE RESULTS COULD THUS BE INTERPRETED AS SHOWING SOME LOSS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR GISCARD'S NEW MAJORITY. BUT FRENCH BY-ELECTIONS TRADITIONALLY DRAW PROTEST VOTES, SINCE THE RESULTS MATTER LITTLE ON A NATION-WIDE SCALE. AND THE HIGH ABSENTEE RATES (25-40 PERCENT) COULD BE DUE IN PART TO GISCARD SUPPORTERS WHO FELT LITTLE INTEREST IN HELPING RE-ELECT OLD GAULLIST FACES' BUT COULD NOT BRING THEMSELVES TO SUPPORT THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES AND SO STAYED HOME. THE LEFT GAINS SEEM TO SHOW A GROWING DISSATISFACTION WITH CERTAIN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POMPIDOU REGIME, AND YET THE TWO MOST PROMINENT GAULLISTS WERE THE ONLY TWO TO GAIN FIRST-ROUND VICTORIES. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THE LEFT IS ACTIVE: MITTERRAND'S VIGOROUS CAMPAIGNING IN ALL SIX DISTRICTS OBVIOUSLY HELPED. NEXT SUNDAY'S RESULTS MAY SHED FURTHER LIGHT ON WHETHER THE LEFT IS ON THE RISE OR MERELY ON THE MOVE.

IRWIN

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